



STATE REPRESENTATIVE KATHLEEN PASSIDOMO

DISTRICT 106

FLORIDA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

2014 LEGISLATIVE SESSION UPDATE

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to serve as your State Representative. It is an honor and a real joy to work each and every day on behalf of the people of this district.

This was a very busy and productive Session which included the passage of the state budget. I am pleased to report that once again we have produced a fiscally responsible budget that provides \$500 million in tax and fee cuts (the largest in over a decade). The Legislature also passed several significant bills during the 2014 Session as a part of the Florida Senate and House of Representatives Joint Work Plan including Florida's first ever G.I. bill, legislation protecting our most vulnerable from sexual offenders and predators, providing substantial reforms to our education system, and strengthening the child welfare system.

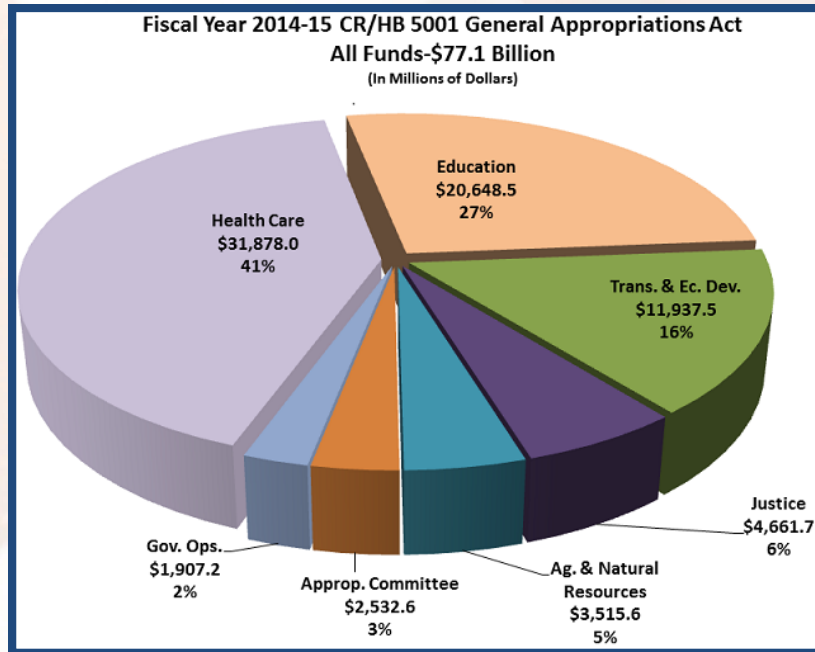


Enclosed in this newsletter, you will find a snapshot of the 2014 Session. As always, I look forward to hearing from you with any comments or questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Representative Kathleen Passidomo

2014-2015 Budget



As mandated by the Florida Constitution, the Florida Legislature passed a balanced state budget for the 2014-15 fiscal year, on time, and with bi-partisan support. This \$77.1 billion budget provides over \$500 million in tax relief and sets out \$3.1 billion in reserves.

Education

This year's budget makes significant investments in our education system increasing K-12 per student funding 2.6 % and total education funding to \$20.7 billion. This funding represents the highest appropriation to our education system in the history of the state. Performance funding will be rewarded to universities that graduate students with the skills necessary to get jobs immediately after college in their chosen fields. Additionally, \$544 million has been provided for maintenance, renovation, and construction projects at K-12 schools, colleges and universities.

Healthcare

The Legislature has provided \$20 million to serve all Floridians on the Agency for Persons with Disabilities Medicaid Waiver Intensive Needs wait list to help provide them with the services they need. We also made a significant financial commitment to reforming child welfare services by adding over \$62 million in recurring funds to reduce caseloads for child protective investigators to better serve and protect children in this state. We also provided \$116 million for cancer treatment education and biomedical research and funding for a new State Veterans' Nursing Home.



Environment

The budget prioritizes our water supply and quality by providing \$30 million for springs restoration, \$135 million for Everglades restoration, \$22.8 million for the Indian River Lagoon and Lake Okeechobee Basin, and \$57.5 million for Florida Forever land purchases.

Promoted Economic Growth

Florida's economic development activities are strengthened in this budget to ensure that we continue to attract new businesses and jobs. We have provided \$233.1 million (which is 18% greater than historical funding levels) in economic development funding including incentives for job creation. This budget invests in infrastructure by fully funding the Transportation Work Program at \$9.2 billion to focus on strategic transportation projects which will connect major markets and increase our state's viability in the national and global economies.



Justice

The Justice Budget was increased to provide additional funds for the Department of Corrections, Parole Commission, State Courts, and the Department of Juvenile Justice. Prevention services were funded including \$6 million for the Guardian ad Litem volunteer initiative and \$2 million for the Pace Centers statewide. Funds have also been allocated for an additional 28 Troopers in the Florida Highway Patrol.

Sponsored Legislation

Ethics & Elections Subcommittee

It was a great honor to be appointed by Speaker Weatherford to lead the Ethics & Elections Subcommittee for the 2014 Session. Our committee had the task of reviewing the progress and implementation of the significant elections reform bill that passed during the previous Session and leading a workshop on an ethics package to further reform our ethics laws. We heard numerous presentations from the Florida Division of Elections, Florida Commission on Ethics, Florida Elections Commission, Florida State Association of Supervisors of Elections, and from the Florida Judicial Qualifications Commission. The committee also worked closely with Secretary of State Ken Detzner and jointly with the Senate Ethics Committee to develop this year's important ethics package which is to be a part of the Legislature's joint "Work Plan Florida" initiative. The ethics package that we presented as our committee bill passed both the House and Senate unanimously. This bill builds upon last year's reform in several significant areas including requiring elected municipal officers to complete four hours of annual ethics, public records, and open meetings training. It also requires that all individuals (not just elected municipal officials) required to complete the training certify completion on their annual financial disclosures. The bill requires officers and employees of quasi-governmental entities to comply with provisions of the state Code of Ethics. Lastly, the bill increases transparency by requiring any person who lobbies a water management district to register as a lobbyist. The Ethics & Elections Subcommittee also discussed other important legislation such as House Memorial 381. This memorial now serves as an application to Congress, pursuant to Article V of the U.S. Constitution, to call an Article V convention of the states for the limited purpose of proposing amendments to the Constitution such as imposing fiscal restraints, limiting the power and jurisdiction of the federal government, and limiting terms of office for federal officials and members of Congress. The Committee also passed HB 609 creating the Article V Constitutional Convention Act. One method of proposing amendments to the United States Constitution is through a constitutional convention pursuant to Article V, which requires Congress to call a convention for proposing amendments when two-thirds of the state legislatures make application to Congress for a convention. Florida law does not provide for appointment or governing of Florida's delegates if a convention is called. This legislation requires the Florida House and Senate to appoint delegates and alternate delegates to an Article V constitutional convention as well as adopt a concurrent resolution to provide specific instructions to the delegates.

Elder Financial Abuse

Elder financial exploitation, the so-called "Crime of the 21st Century", is a serious issue facing Florida and the nation. Exploitation of the Elderly is increasing as the population ages and thieves target the infirmities of aging. HB 409 passed addressing the historic hurdles of a successful prosecution under a variety of factual scenarios, many of which have been litigated and determined to be criminal by impaneled judges, but later were reversed by the courts in accordance with gaps in the law. HB 409 closes those gaps and provides comprehensive protection to citizens from scammers and thieves. The new law provides a method of introducing reliable hearsay statements in the event of an elder victim's death, or memory loss thus holding offenders accountable and provides criminal penalties for those predators who exploit the elderly through joint accounts intended for convenience. HB 409 creates a rebuttable presumption that if an elderly person makes a gift of \$10,000 or more to a person they have known for less than two years who is not a relative and for which no real value is received the gift is a result of exploitation. The bill also makes it unlawful for any person to willfully, and without authorization, fraudulently use personal identification information of an individual without their consent and creates the Identity Theft and Fraud Grant Pilot Program which will award grants to support local law enforcement agencies in the investigation and enforcement of personal identification information theft and fraud.

Guardianship

Throughout the State of Florida some of our most vulnerable citizens are being victimized by the very individuals appointed to protect their interests. Under HB 635 which was passed by the legislature, the courts will now be able to fully audit guardianship accounts to confirm that expenditures are proper and lawful reflecting a cooperative effort with the Clerks of Courts to provide additional scrutiny over guardians appointed to manage the affairs of vulnerable citizens. This law also provides the courts with means to compel a guardian to produce records for the audit. Criminal and credit background checks will be required of guardians before appointment. This legislation allows for the removal of a guardian for failure to submit audits. In my view HB 635 takes a big step towards demanding more accountability and curbing abuse by those who would hold their own self-interests above the interests of those they've sworn to protect.



Title Insurance

The economic loss rule limits recovery by parties to a contract that suffer only economic damages to their negotiated contract-remedy and precludes recovery under tort law. HB 321, which the legislature passed unanimously, reinstates application of the economic loss rule to title insurance by providing that only contract remedies are available for the breach of a duty which arises solely from the terms of a contract of title insurance or certain other instruments (e.g. closing protection letters) issued by a title insurer. Without this legislation I believe title insurance rates in the State would skyrocket as title insurers would need to establish greater reserves to cover any tort losses.

Honor Flight Network

I sponsored resolution HR 9037 recognizing the Honor Flight Network for its service to the valiant veterans of WWII. The Honor Flight Network was established to fly America's Veterans to Washington D.C. to view and reflect at the memorials that were constructed to honor them.

Session Highlights

Honoring Florida 's Veterans

HB 7015 was signed into law by Governor Scott on March 31st establishing Florida as the top "Welcome Home" state in the nation for veterans, military personnel and their families. This legislation creates the Congressman C.W. Bill Young Tuition Waiver program which waives out-of-state tuition and fees for honorably discharged veterans and increases funding for the Education Dollars for Duty program to allow more members of the Florida National Guard to earn a degree. The bill also includes provisions aimed at helping veterans find employment, including the creating of the nonprofit Florida Is For Veterans, Inc., to assist retired and recently separated military personnel to make Florida their home, equip them for opportunities to get a job and promote the hiring of veterans.



Protecting Florida's Most Vulnerable

This Session the Florida Legislature passed a series of bills to protect children from sexually violent predators. This legislative package strengthens Florida's ability to punish these criminals to the fullest extent of the law helping to ensure they will no longer slip through the cracks of our justice system and reoffend. SB 522 creates a process by which persons sentenced to a term in jail can be referred to the Department of Children and Families (DCF) for civil commitment by state attorneys. SB 524 creates enhanced standards for the membership of the DCF multidisciplinary team and SB 526 strengthens the registration requirements applicable to sexual predator and offenders. Finally, SB 526 increases the penalties for specified sexual battery and lewd or lascivious offenses against children, and increases the minimum mandatory sentence to 50 years for dangerous sexual felony offenders convicted of certain serious sex offenses. The legislature also passed SB 1666 to reform Florida's child welfare system. The bill helps children who are at risk of or have suffered abuse and neglect by improving transparency, accountability, and quality in the child welfare system. We also unanimously passed HB 7141 which supports the state's efforts against human trafficking by creating new administrative requirements for DCF to ensure they have the infrastructure to respond properly to victims and creates a certification process and standards for "safe houses" and "safe foster homes".

Tax Relief

Floridians will see their registration costs reduced by \$25.05 for heavyweight vehicles, \$21.55 for middle-weight vehicles, and \$18.55 for lightweight vehicles providing \$395 million in tax relief annually for Floridians. This tax cut package incorporates several sales tax holidays including a "Back to School" holiday from August 1 to August 3, a "Hurricane Preparedness" holiday from May 31 to June 8, and a sales tax holiday from September 19 to September 21 on the first \$1,500 spent on energy-efficient and water efficient appliances. Sales tax exemptions have also been provided for children's car seats and youth bicycle helmets and certain prepaid college meal plans.



Other Important Legislation

- Recently, over 250,000 Floridians were faced with substantial flood insurance premium rate increases due to the federal Biggert-Waters Act of 2012. The Legislature passed SB 542 which takes important steps to add more competition to the flood insurance market giving Florida homeowners additional options by encouraging more private sector choices.
- HB 7031 which passed unanimously removes the references in Florida Statutes to the Common Core standards that were placed in law last year when our state was on a different path. A number of significant changes were made to the standards (again referred to as the Sunshine State Standards), the state of Florida withdrew from the federal testing programs and SB 864 makes clear that instructional material and curriculum choices are the constitutional responsibility of district school boards by maintaining the option for each board to implement its own instructional materials program. The Legislature also addressed the issue of student data security by passing SB 188 prohibiting any agency or institution from collecting information regarding the political affiliation, voting history, religious affiliation, or biometrics of a student or the student's parent or sibling.

CONTACT

STATE REPRESENTATIVE
KATHLEEN PASSIDOMO
DISTRICT 106

CAPITAL OFFICE:
218 HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
402 SOUTH MONROE STREET
TALLAHASSEE, FL 32399
PHONE: 850-717-5106



DISTRICT OFFICE:
3299 TAMiami TRAIL EAST, SUITE 304
NAPLES, FL 34112
PHONE: 239-417-6200
FAX: 239-417-6204

E-MAIL: KATHLEEN.PASSIDOMO@MYFLORIDAHOUSE.GOV